

## WRITING THE BODY: A STUDY OF SAVITHRI RAJEEVAN'S POETRY

K.S. JAIME CHITHRA

Research Scholar, Department of English, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady, Kerala, India

### ABSTRACT

*This paper is an attempt to study the gender politics in the writings of poet Savithri Rajeevan's writing, about the female body and the current creative attempt from the female writers all over the world. This paper tries to focus on the body representation and creative use of body as a theme, to find language and identity.*

**KEYWORDS:** Find Language and Identity, Women's Body is Implicated in Various Social and Cultural Practices, Women's Subversive Practices and Struggles for Self – Determination & Empowerment

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### INTRODUCTION

The past decade has marked an enormous upsurge of interdisciplinary interest in the body, both in academia and in popular culture. The body has captured the attention of contemporary scholars, that several interdisciplinary texts have emerged. In the last thirty years, huge amounts of feminist research on the female body have been generated from a diversity of disciplines, theoretical perspectives and methodologies. Various studies on female body, focus on how women's body is implicated in various social and cultural practices, and also on the symbolic representations of the female body. The history of women's body has been mapped in various areas of social life, and attention has been devoted to how institutions and cultural discourses shape women's embodied experiences.

Contemporary feminist theories have drawn upon the body, in order to understand gender and sexual difference. Scholars have shown, how the female body is implicated in the construction of femininity, as well as how differences are constituted along the lines of social, class, race ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, able-bodiedness and more. The female body is the object of processes of domination and control, as well as the site of women's subversive practices and struggles for self – determination and empowerment.

Although, there are many female writers who write Malayalam poetry we can see that, very few among them took the body as their theme. Among these writers, the attitude towards the theme varies according to their personal politics and movements they represent. In her collection, 'Dehandaram', Savithri Rajeevan is attempting to break away all the patriarchal concepts of the female body, which has been established through the ages, myths, literature, history, etc. We can see that, this as a part of her attempt to find out her own language, to give expression to her own experiences and emotions, where the male created language proved inefficient. She is creating a world of female experience, where readers can get into the experience of mythical characters and also experience a contemporary woman's situation, through the vision of a female narrator. All the poems in the collection can be seen as a series, exploring the subordinate position of women, as a result of various patriarchal institutions working together, throughout the ages. Different poems concentrate on the functioning of different

patriarchal attempts. Savithri Rajeevan writes with a realization that, to find out a language of her own is equal to finding out an identity of her own, that is nothing other than discovering her own body, which has no expression / existence or has only falsified expressions. Savithri Rajeevan attempts to expose the hollowness of the existing concepts, rather than to build a new concept of the female body.

She tries to bring out the multiple subordinated states of women, by showing how the body or bodily experience of women is consciously kept apart. They make it difficult for her to identify what is hers, self and how she is the other. The woman is trained in that manner from her birth, to realize that there is no difference between the other, created by patriarchal society and her. They are made to realize that, she got no self at all. Initial steps in her search for identity, which Savithri Rajeevan identifies as same as the search for female body itself, is de-rooting the existing concepts of the female body, which is deeply rooted in myth-history, literature etc.

The poem “Beyond the Body” is a clear attempt by her, to disclose the brutal hands of patriarchy that shattered and is still shattering female body into nothing. The poet takes the readers back to the days of myth, creating the shows to explain how female existence is nullified in it. She also calls the attention of readers, to the established literature in Malayalam and critically evaluates the misogynist politics behind it. She exposes the misleading representation of the female body, which can be called as “naturalization of female body”. How education turns out to be a tool in the hands of patriarchy, to maintain its authority? How the invisible existence of women is made possible through generations? All becomes her area of concentration. As she is from a post-colonial world, she talks about colonized experience, which brought her into contact with the west and which helped her to be conscious about the existence of something called female body/female identity. She realizes that, it is totally different from what her society made her to believe. But, she is aware that, her identity is not discovered or still to be discovered. In this poem, Savithri has taken the myth from Mahabahrata, which is least used in any kind of re-reading or re-creating a woman’s identity before. And the purpose of selecting such a myth, is to show off the silenced, invisible position of woman. It makes this attempt significant. Her search for the female body, begins in the first line of the poem itself, where she shows how in the epics the woman’s position is nullified, how her body is kept apart from any description. Savithri’s search for female identity begins with the realization that, the female body is fake or bogus. To get rid of that fake identity, and to create or to find out the real one is to de-root all that myths, by showing how the female body is neglected from the birth itself. She takes the myth associated with the birth of Krishna, where it is said that, when Kamsa came to kill the eighth child of his sister, instead of the boy expected there, there was a girl child. When Kamsa was about to kill that girl child, it escaped into the sky and disappeared and turned into an oracle, which warned Kamsa about the birth of a body child who will persecute him in future.

She shows that, how in the myth, the female body is kept hidden and made to give voice to the god’s decision, to speak the male centered language. So, from the beginning – from the prehistory itself, female body is not there in any narration. The current trend of body politics in relation to gender politics, shoots from the same realization, where women writers began to create their language and unite female body.

To enforce her argument on female body, she calls attention again to Mahabharata itself, where a good part of the text is used for describing the childhood of Krishna. His way of dressing, eating, playing, interacting is not merely the matter of interest or ideal for Hindus, but a matter of devotion. The boy Child Krishna,

“Unnikrishna” is a myth, that justifies the mischief in relation to a body child or a male figure. The world and worldly pleasure are for boy child only is the concept, that gets established through this myth. Savithri here, claims the

right of the female body, over the world and worldly pleasures, by showing that this invisible girl child would also have enjoyed the nature, in the same manner as Unnikrishna, even though it has got no description in the epic. Thus, Savithri Rajeevan, is asserting the existence of the female body by detaching it from the epic Mahabharata. In this poem itself, she exposes the male centered voice of Ramayana. Ramayana associates most women with being essentially weak and simple. According to Kausalya, women do not care for good family, good deeds, or wisdom and their hearts are ever inconstant.

All over India, Sita is treated by Brahmanic patriarchy as an ideal model of Hindu womanhood. The myth of Indian womanhood, which is directly connected to the myth of purity, finds it as a strong base in the construct of the myth of Sita. Women's general subordination operates through ideology. In India, particularly through "pativrata dharma", the ideology internalized by women. They attempted to live up to the idealistic notion of womanhood, constructed by the patriarchal ideologies of the society.

Uma Chakravathi, in her essay "Conceptualizing Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste and State" make a detailed study over the concept. She finds the origin of this concept, has its base on the need of controlling women's sexuality, which indirectly serves Brahmin's notion of caste purity. In the case of Hindu society, the design of the patriarchal caste, class structure was mapped out by Brahmanism. Pathivrata, the specific dharma of Hindu wife, then became the ideology by which women are accepted. Chastity and wifely fidelity became the highest expression of selfhood. Pathivrata the ideologic valparadha of the Hindu woman was thus, the means by which the hierarchical structure of the social order was reproduced. To break these concepts, Savithri Rajeevan exposes the myth of Lakshmanarekha in the middle of which, woman is always a victim and the story also tells the fate of a woman, who dares to cross the "Rekha".

In the beginning of the next stanza of the poem, she exposes the misogynist representation of the female body in the mainstream male writers, taking Kumaran Asan an example. P.P. Raveendran in his essay "Kumaran Asan and the Dialectic of the Indian Renaissance," shown how the female characters in the work of Kumaran Asan break away from the traditional concepts, the female character is at the same time conforming to some of the stereotypes, about the oriental women that have passed into the popular imagination of the nineteenth century. This essay is a study on Kumaran Asan's Chinthavishtaya Sita. In the poem of Savithri Rajeevan, she is concentrating on the female body, depicted in the works of Asanas he is representing the modern age in Malayalam poetry. All critics agree that, Asan's writings embody the moment of modern India's social Renaissance. Deep in discussion over how he uses the language in a revolutionary way, how he takes themes different from the existing conventional ones, how his style contributes to modernity in Malayalam poetry, etc. thus, we take Kumaran Asan as the embodiment of modernity and renaissance at the same time. The position of female characters in the work of Asan, needs to be studied to understand the position of woman in the age. But, Savithri Rajeevan concentrating on the representation of the female body shows that, the female body is neglected. Then, also by signifying Asan's well known statement on love, "mamsanipanthamalla Ragam" that love is not attached to the body. Then, also there is no change, as in Mahabharata she continues to wait as beloved. To understand the period of Asan as an age of modernity, or as an age of renaissance is doubtful from a woman's point of view.

It is in line 8, we see that, the word body used by Savithri Rajeevan means nothing other than identity – "That body unknowing the body". Here, she takes attention to what's in body politics known as, "naturalization of female body". Despite the differences among feminists in ideology and tactics, all share the goal of challenging accepted ideas about women's bodies. Throughout history, women have experienced social pressures, to maintain acceptable appearances. In India, the patriarchal concept of the female body revolves around Aryan female features, that's a beautiful or perfect

woman in history or prehistory, are described to have wheat like color, bright big eye, etc. This is similar to the western concept of women, where only the white women's feature comes into consideration. At the beginning of the body politics in western feminism, the white feminists tried to liberate themselves. We can say that, it is in the same manner that body politics begins in Savithri Rajeevan. In it, she is trying to liberate women's body from the brahmanic patriarchal concepts. She concentrates on how the invisible existence of the female / body is affirmed through oral culture. If, one attempts to control women by attributing fragile female qualities, the other is by highlighting the demonic qualities, where women were described as witches. The purpose is fulfilled though the myth of Yakshi. The new feminist reading on witches says that, witches were women who were not ready to submit themselves to male domination and they were feminists in their ideology. This reading can be applied in the context of Yakshi myth, where the women with identity consciousness are treated as Yakshi and are isolated in the society. Their destiny and stories are spread through oral culture, both to control and frighten women. Savithri Rajeevan exposes this myth by showing, it was used to mute female voices and so to make her body invisible.

She extends her evaluation, even into Christian mythology. Inferiority of a woman persisted all through the Old Testament. The very first myth of creation brings out: while Adam was directly created by God, Eve was an afterthought, created out of one of Adam's ribs. She was created because, the lonely Adam needed a helpmeet for him. After the fall, God cursed man with hard work and enmity with the serpent, but eve he cursed thus: "I will greatly multiply the sorrow and the conception. Their desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee". Virginity at marriage was an essential condition for the woman, but not for the man. We read, but if the tokens of virginity be not found for the damsel, then she was to be dumped in front of her father's house and stoned to death. The woman's inherent inferiority is epitomized in the genesis story, where a woman was the secondly created and the first to fall. St. Augustine in his "of holy virginity" says that, man alone was created in God's image. The picture is somewhat different in the New Testament. With the advent of St. Paul, as the New Testament lawgiver, the attitude to women undergoes some radical changes. True, Paul says, "there is no such thing as a Jew and Greek, male and female; ye are all one person in Jesus Christ". But, in secular life the sex difference persists. Paul commands the husband to love the wife, wives, he says, should submit themselves into their own husbands, as unto the Lord for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church. So, let the wives be (submissive) to their husbands in everything. Paul clearly has a double standard, regarding man and woman.

Savithri Rajeevan uses the phrase "Virgin May idol", to show the over importance given to "virginity", as an essential condition. It is idolized in popular culture to control her sexuality. Virginity concept is a complex but powerful construct over women, which asks women to control their bodily needs, to have a respectable position in the society. So, the women body is idolized in Christian myth, giving over importance to the state of being virgin, has a final effect of nullifying female body into nothing other than stone, without human emotions, or needs. It can remain virgin; it can remain like a stone, like a stone structure.

Savithri Rajeevan, in the last part of the poem, mentions about the social upheavals that has changed society's attitude towards women and her role in the society, during the colonial period. Like English education has done good for the lower caste people, being aware of their rights and to fight for their equality, it has done a great deal for the emancipation of the position of the women in Indian Society. It is through the contact with the west, that women in India got some idea about her own identify and her right to have equal position in the society. This helped women to move forward from their marginalized condition that existed before colonial rule. But, this does not mean that woman have

achieved equality.

Although, the contact with the West helped to destroy some of the worst sexual discrimination it brought a new kind of mastery over colonized women, where society began to judge colonized women on western white women's standards. To get a position and to be recognized as a woman, she needs to have certain attractive appearances that western patriarchy expects. Thus, a new kind of patriarchal power, which is a mixture of Brahmanism and western developed. So, if we look from the angle of body politics, apart from identity consciousness, women's body is still under the regulations of patriarchal power.

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